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*The Nature of Christian Charity, or Love stated; its  
Excellency proved; and the Practice of it enforced.*

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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE  
PARISH-CHURCH

OF  
N A N T W I C H,

On FRIDAY Nov. 24th, 1780;

BEFORE THE

T R U S T E E S

OF THE

A L M S - H O U S E S,

FOUNDED BY THE LATE

Sr. E. WRIGHT, Kt. Lord Mayor of LONDON,

AND THE

G O V E R N O R S

OF THE

W O R K - H O U S E,

LATELY ERECTED, WITHIN THE SAID PARISH.

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By JOHN SMITH, A. B. *K*  
RECTOR OF NANTWICH.

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N A N T W I C H:

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S E R M O N.

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i. COR. Chap. xiii. Ver. 13.

*And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is, Charity.*

THE apostle, in this chapter, treats concerning the great duty of christian charity, or love. The original word, indeed, properly signifies the love of God, and our neighbour; and St. Paul, here, earnestly recommends it, by shewing the indispensable necessity, and great importance of it. He gives us a most beautiful and animated description of the glorious properties, and excellent fruits of this truly amiable virtue; and evidently shews how much it excels



the greatest of all other spiritual gifts and graces. Indeed, faith itself, will, at the close of our abode on earth, be swallowed up of life; and hope will then be turned into enjoyment; but love, divine love, that most excellent and amiable of all christian graces will still remain: It will not only remain, but it will likewise be continually increasing, and improving both towards our God and Saviour, and towards all our celestial companions, whether angels or glorified saints. Sensible of this, the apostle in the text, gives an evident preference to charity before faith and hope; "*And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*"

I beg leave from these words, to consider, I. The nature of christian charity, or love, as it relates to the bodies of men. II. As it relates to their souls; and, lastly, give a word of exhortation to all here present, that they may be careful to be found in the daily practice of this great duty.

I.



I. I shall consider this great duty of christian charity, or love, as it relates to the bodies of men.

The Almighty, in his great wisdom, has so constituted things in this present world, that we are indispensably obliged, and called upon to be helpful to each other. God, in the course of his good providence, has wisely ordained, that there should be various and different states and conditions in life. It is the Lord Almighty, who maketh poor, and who maketh rich; who bringeth down, and who raiseth up: He assures us, in his word, that "The poor shall never  
" cease out of the land;" and Solomon tells us that "The rich and poor meet together;" informing us at the same time, that he "The Lord is the maker of them all;" the same benevolent author of their being, the same wise disposer of their respective states and conditions: And the reason why there is so great an inequality appointed and permitted, by the supreme Being, among the  
sons

sons of men, evidently seems to be this; that the necessary business of live may be carried on in a due course, and in a regular way; and further, that those who are fixed in high stations, may shew their kindness and compassion to their poor and indigent brethren.

Indeed we were created to glorify God, and to assist each other. God has made no man so independant in life, as not to stand in need of the assistance of his fellow-creatures. The rich can no more live without the labour of the poor, than the poor can support themselves without the aid of the wealthy. Both states, therefore, are indispensably necessary to the well-being of either.

Let the rich, then, no more despise or under-value the pious poor, (who are right dear in the sight of God) neither let the poor envy their superiors, nor murmur at their low condition. Both are alike  
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the offspring and children of God; both are the workmanship of the same divine hand; and both may be, thro' grace, partakers of the same divine nature. God is no respecter of persons; but in every age, and in every nation; in every state and in every condition, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him: Let not, therefore, the rich man either trust in, or boast himself in his riches; he knoweth not what a day may bring forth. He, who is to day a king, may, before to morrow's dawn, be brought low, even to the dust of the earth. A thousand accidents daily furround us; the vicissitudes of human life are innumerable; its wheels are ever in motion; and the great disposer of all things, who guides and directs them, is continually putting down one, and setting up another.

In prosperity, therefore, let us look for and expect, that in a mutable world, a change may come. Let us be thankful to

God



God for our present comforts; humble in ourselves, and charitable to the poor and needy. We are not proprietors, but only stewards of what we possess. God is the great proprietor of all, who delivers his talents to his servants, in different degrees, and proportions, according to his own good pleasure.

An awful day is indeed coming, when he will most assuredly reckon with every one of us. Happy they who are so wise as to endeavour, by the grace of God, duly to improve what is committed to their charge. And if these things are so, it will highly behove us all seriously to enquire (as in the immediate presence of an omniscient and heart-searching God) whether we have been, or now are, faithful in the distribution, and employment of that portion of goods which providence has allotted us? Do we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bid the oppressed go free? Can we say, each for himself, with

with holy Job, " I was eyes to the blind,  
 " and feet, was I to the lame. I was a  
 " father to the poor. When the ear heard  
 " me, then it blessed me; and when the  
 " eye saw me, it gave witness to me; be-  
 " cause I delivered the poor that cried,  
 " and the fatherless, and him that had  
 " none to help him. The blessing of him  
 " that was ready to perish came upon me;  
 " and I caused the widow's heart to sing  
 " for joy."

III Blessed, unspeakably blessed are the rich  
 and powerful, who, thus, by grace, wise-  
 ly and faithfully employ their riches and  
 power, to promote the divine glory, and  
 the good of their fellow-creatures. They,  
 indeed, are truly rich: rich in faith, rich  
 in love, and rich in the enjoyment of all  
 spiritual Blessings in Christ Jesus. They  
 are possessed of the pearl of great price;  
 they have an interest in their Lord and  
 Saviour, Jesus Christ; they have union and  
 communion with him: They experience

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that peace which passeth all understanding; they are filled with all joy and peace in believing, and they shall finally enter into the joy of their Lord.

Here, then, we have ample encouragement to abound in every good work. Even a cup of cold water, if given to a distressed brother, out of a principle of faith, in Christ, and love to man, for Christ's sake, will not (if our abilities extend no further) be over-looked, or forgotten at the last day. Our smallest services will then be most amply rewarded; not in a way of debt, or merit, but *freely*, by the grace of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And can you, my brethren, wish, nay, can you possibly have greater encouragement to do good, and to communicate than that which is held forth in the sacred oracles? Surely not. Examine yourselves, therefore, whether ye be in the faith, and prove your own selves by the fruits which your faith produces. A tree is known by its fruits.



fruits. If you abound in the good fruits of the spirit (the chief of which, remember, is the grace of charity, or love) you then are evidently led by the spirit of God, you are his children, and shall be heirs together of the grace of life. Love is the fulfilling of the law. God is love; he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Wherever this divine grace of love is found, it is an evident proof that we are real christians; that we dwell in Christ and Christ in us; that we are one with Christ, and Christ with us. But if we are destitute of this divine principle, we have then the greatest reason to conclude, that we do not belong to the flock of Christ; but rather, on the contrary, that we are under the guidance of the infernal tyrant.

Be not deceived: It is true, God has given us all things richly to enjoy; but we are not permitted to bury, or mis-employ

our talents: If we do the former, we shall be cast into outer darkness, as unprofitable servants, if the latter, we shall as unfaithful stewards and wasters of our Lord's goods be subject to the severest condemnation. And yet, alas! how many prodigal sons and daughters, may we find in the present day. How many nobles and great men have we now, who had much rather spend their money in vain and sinful pleasures, in idle dissipations, and luxurious entertainments, than in relieving the pious poor? They are ever more ready to expend their substance in theatrical entertainments; in balls and assemblies; in races and masquerades; in horses and hounds; in gaming, and bad women; then to nourish, comfort, and relieve their distressed fellow-creatures.

May all who consume their substance in these unchristian practices (over-looking at the same time, the distresses of their poor brethren) consider in due time, both their guilt and danger. God will surely visit

visit for these things all who persevere in them; most probably in this world with remorse and anguish, with poverty and distress; but if they are spared in this life, God will most certainly punish them with the greatest severity in the next. We read that Dives was great and powerful; he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: but, alas! we find that all his grandeur could not exempt him from the awful stroke of death, or the misery of the damned; for in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments. May all great men, consider this, who consume their substance in vanity and riotous living, lest God pluck them suddenly away, and there be none to deliver them!

Riches profit not in the day of wrath:  
 No; if they have been unjustly acquired,  
 or fordidly hoarded up, to the neglect of  
 good and charitable actions, or profusely  
 squandered away in the pursuit of sinful  
 sensual



fenfual pleasures, they will at the day of judgement, be a means of your condemnation: remember you will then be judged, not according to the greatness of your worldly possessions, but according to the good or bad use you have made of them.

If you kindly relieve your indigent and distressed fellow-christians; the Lord Jesus Christ, who has a most tender concern and sympathy for his poor members, condescends graciously to look upon the kindness as done to himself; "In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And can there be any person, professing christianity, so ungrateful and obdurate, as to deny administering to the poor and needy, who are the representatives of the Lord Jesus, a liberal proportion of the substance which the divine Saviour and Redeemer has given him? God forbid! the supposition is too horrid to dwell upon.

II. I proceed, therefore, now to consider the nature of christian love, or charity as it relates to the souls of men.

And here I would observe that the soul of man is infinitely more valuable than the body.

Could we gain the whole world at the expence of our precious and immortal souls, we should surely make a very foolish and desperate exchange. It is needful therefore, and our bounden duty to do all in our power, by the help of God, to promote the spiritual welfare of our brethren.

Let us kindly watch over each other's conduct, for our mutual good; and let us reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all meekness, gentleness, and love. Let us rebuke our neighbour, rather than suffer sin to rest upon him; and, taking the apostles advice, "Let us exhort one another daily, " whilst it is called to day, lest any of us " should be hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin."

Some

Some of you, perhaps, may be inclined to relieve the bodies of your fellow-sinners, who are nevertheless supine and careless about the welfare of their souls: But how sad is it, to have thought for their mortal, but none for their immortal part? The tender mercies of all such persons are indeed defective and, comparatively, cruel.

This is the noblest and greatest charity, to convert a sinner from the error of his ways, and to save a soul from death. This is a much nobler kindness, and of far greater advantage than the relief of the poor and needy. Death will soon deliver the most wretched of mortals from all the troubles and sorrows of this mortal life; but, death to those, who are in a state of nature, unrenewed and unchanged, will be so far from being a release from their misery, that it will, in fact, be an inlet to inexpressible torments, and infinite misery.

Indeed,



Indeed, if we are truly sensible of the value of our own souls, and seriously consider what an inestimable price the Lord Jesus Christ paid for their ransom, it is utterly impossible that we can be lukewarm and indifferent to the spiritual concerns of others. All who are truly converted to God, and born again of water, and of the spirit, know assuredly that they were snatched as brands out of the burning fire. A deep and affecting sense of the love of Christ to their souls, in bringing about this wonderful change, and in turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of satan unto God; this sense, I say, constraineth all true believers greatly to long after the salvation of their brethren.

If the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, be in our hearts, it will surely evidence itself by a diligent endeavour to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of all men.—I judge no man; but earnestly beseech you

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all to judge yourselves impartially, concerning this important matter.

If, on enquiry, you find a true love to God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent; together with an ardent zeal to promote the edification and salvation of mankind, (according to your respective talents and abilities) you are most assuredly the children of the Highest, and heirs, thro' grace, of everlasting life. If this be your happy experience, rejoice in the Lord always, and pray for a constant supply of his holy spirit, that you may abound in love, and zeal, in truth and holiness; more and more. "Forgetting those things which are behind, "reach forth unto those things which are "before, and press towards the mark, for the "prize of the high calling of God in Christ "Jesus." Thus as you grow in years you will grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I proceed now, lastly, to give a word of exhortation to all who are here present, to be found in the daily practice of this great duty of christian charity, or love.

The praises of charity are, as you have heard, many and great in the sacred oracles. The apostle, in the text, gives it the preference before either faith, or hope. Love is, indeed, the plant of paradise; it is a truly divine, and most amiable grace: It proceeds from the holy spirit of God; and all who are under its blessed guidance have, as it were, the broad seal of heaven impressed on their hearts; and do evidently shew that they are the children of the Highest; who is loving to every man; and whose tender mercies are over all his works. Charity, or the grace of love, never faileth. It may be said never to fail, as it proceeds from an unchangeable God. It is not so with us. We are poor, weak, mutable creatures. There may be, and alas! frequently are, ebbs and flowings in our charity; but yet



where there is the *truth of grace in the heart*, there the grace of love does and will in a degree, remain and increase for ever.

True believers always do, and ever will shew charity to all, who have erred and gone astray from God's holy commandments. They cannot bear, without great sorrow and compunction of heart, to see the daily triumphs of sin and satan: They mourn and grieve for all who are unconverted; and for all those too, who will not mourn for themselves, but are seeking death in the error of their ways: Nor do they stop here; they not only pity, but they pray for them too; that God would give them repentance unto life: they look stedfastly to God for a blessing on their charitable endeavours; and, in an humble dependance on his divine aid; they exert every rational and proper method to impress these unhappy wanderers with a sense of their extreme danger, and to bring them back to the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

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So gracious and condescending is our divine Master, that he often gives a blessing to the pious endeavours of the poorest and meanest of his faithful servants. A word spoken in due season by a private christian, is sometimes so forcibly impressed on the conscience of a sinner, that, like Felix, he is made to tremble, and hereby effectually converted, and brought home to God: And for the encouragement of all; both ministers, and people, in their pious endeavours to promote the welfare of immortal souls, the Almighty has assured us, that they that be wise, in winning souls, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, for ever and ever.

Let us all then, my brethren, from this moment lay aside all manner of excuses, and sincerely resolve, as we have opportunity, to do good unto all men. Let us always endeavour, and ever take pleasure in relieving

relieving the necessities and distresses, whether temporal or spiritual, of our poor and indigent brethren. It is more blessed to give, than to receive; and the more you abound in the good works of beneficence and love, the more you will experience of solid comfort, and inward satisfaction. It may truly be said of love, that it brings with it, its own happiness, even in the present life; besides those inestimable rewards which await it in a future state: "Let your light, therefore, so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven."

Indeed it gives me real pleasure to observe that you have not been altogether unmindful of this important precept. Your late kindness to the poor, in erecting a new and very commodious house for their reception; and in providing them with clean and necessary food and raiment, are incontestable and pleasing proofs of this; and  
loudly



loudly call for a grateful acknowledgement of your benevolence, which I hope they will not forget to return.

The rules and orders which are appointed for the better government of the poor, in their new habitation, appear, to me, very pious, proper, judicious, and well calculated, to promote both their temporal comfort, and eternal happiness. Every benevolent man must rejoice at the completion of your scheme; and highly applaud it; and with respect to the cavils of the captious and malevolent, I hope, you will ever turn a deaf ear. There is no design so noble, no institution so benevolent, as to be proof against the attacks of calumny and censure; but these, I trust, you will always disregard: A lying tongue is but for a moment: And I am persuaded, that a few years will evince to all, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the scheme which you are engaged in, will prove not only a great

great comfort and relief to the poor and needy; but likewise be of real advantage to those of better condition, by reducing the great, and of late, enormous expence of maintaining the poor. May you, therefore, be enabled to go on and prosper in this laudable and christian undertaking; and I can most sincerely add, that I wish you good luck, in the name of the Lord: may you always abound in this, and every other labour of love, and, may the God of love condescend to bless and accept all your services, and all your kindness to his poor members, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The duty of charity, is (as you have heard) very necessary and important; yet we must remember that christian prudence is to direct us both with respect to the manner, and measure of performing it.

Our families and dependents have the first claim to our support, protection, and  
care;

care; and when they are provided for with conveniences, suitable to their respective situations, and conditions, and a decent provision made for their future support, then we are surely (as stewards) accountable for the surplus, to our divine Master, who has expressly enjoined us to bestow it in works of charity and mercy.

Sensible of this, the benevolent founder of this charity (which we are now met more immediately to commemorate) was, we find, "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." And, indeed, it is rather difficult to determine, whether his piety or his prudence was more remarkable, in this institution.

Instead of encouraging and relieving the idle, lazy vagabond, who makes it a trade, daily to ply about the streets, and conquer the well-meaning, but unwary passenger by dint of mere impudence, and solicitation, he wisely chose to erect an assylum for his honest and industrious, but aged and infirm fellow-christians. Such persons are, indeed, the greatest objects of compassion, and best

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entitled to all the relief which the humane and charitable can afford them. Bodily want, added to bodily infirmities renders the weight of their calamity still heavier: To remove and alleviate this unhappiness, and to make the well-disposed poor more comfortable in their declining years, is certainly an object worthy the attention of every real christian.

However, the benevolent founder, of this hospitable institution, seems to have had a much higher, and nobler object in view, than the bare relief of their bodily necessities. This appears from considering his prudent, wise, and pious regulations; all which have an evident tendency to reform their lives, and regulate their manners.

I hope therefore that you, who are his trustees, will conscientiously adhere to those rules which he has so judiciously prescribed for the regulation of his charity; to a due observance of which, he calls upon you in the most solemn and awful manner. In short, this wise and pious gentleman, for  
such

such I believe he was, has acted in this institution, suitably to the dignity of the christian character; and as became a disciple of the compassionate and merciful Jesus, the great redeemer and lover of souls.

Since then the pious founder of this charitable institution, and the judicious governors of our newly erected work-house, have laid down and adopted such wise and salutary rules for regulating the conduct of all who partake of their benevolence; let me now earnestly recommend it to you, my poor, but dearly beloved brethren, who constantly partake of their liberality. to be thankful, both to God and man, for the many blessings you enjoy, and sincerely to strive to answer the kind intentions of the donors. As you have now but little occasion to trouble yourselves with worldly matters, so you have evidently more leisure to provide for the happiness and welfare of your immortal souls. To promote this desirable end, I shall be glad to contribute by every way and means in my power. You may always depend; therefore on an easy access to me for spiritual

tual advice; nor can you possibly oblige me more than by coming frequently to ask it: The priests' lips should keep knowledge, and the people are expressly enjoined to seek the law at his mouth.

May the giver of every good and perfect gift, give you all a new heart, and renew a right spirit within you. If you earnestly seek this greatest of blessings at the throne of grace, you are sure to obtain it. Your poverty is no bar to your loving or serving God, or to the reception of his holy spirit, but rather the contrary. God hath chosen the poor in this world, who are rich in faith, to be heirs of his kingdom. Honest poverty is no disgrace, it stains no blood; nay, it is infinitely preferable to rich knavery. Remember that the great King and Lord of all, the ever-blessed Jesus, became poor, that we, thro' his poverty, might be made rich. He was reduced much lower, than the lowest of you all. He subsisted on the alms of his pious followers; and was even destitute of a place wherein to lay his head. A moment's serious reflection on this most  
astonishing



astonishing condescension, and great humility of the eternal son of God, must surely silence all our complaints, and reconcile us to the lowest condition, and to the severest dispensations of providence.

If the Saviour of mankind drank thus deeply of the bitter cup of affliction and sorrow; and was made perfect through sufferings; who, or what are we, that we should expect an exemption from afflictions? These, and many other afflictive dispensations we have all deserved, for our innumerable offences; and they are to be received not only with humility and patience; but, with thankfulness too, as the messengers of our heavenly father's love; "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Let us all then, my brethren, both high and low, rich and poor, daily strive to shew our gratitude to the Almighty, for his innumerable favours, by a life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. God is good and gracious to us all; oh, let us not be disobedient

obedient, and unthankful to him! He is the kindest, and best of masters: and it is our happiness as well as duty, to serve and obey him. In serving him (who stands not in the least need either of us or our services) we take the only wise and effectual way, truly to serve ourselves; and to promote both our present peace, and eternal happiness. May we all therefore, sincerely and heartily strive, "Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God." Let us daily offer unto God thanksgiving for all "His goodness and loving kindness to us, and to all men." Let us (as our excellent church teaches) "Bless him for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for his inestimable love, in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And let us beseech him, to give us that due sense of all his mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we may shew forth his praise, not only with our lips, but

"but likewise in our lives, by giving up  
 "ourselves to his service, and by walking  
 "before him in righteousness all our days  
 "thro' Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus to live, and thus to act, will be  
 pleasing to God, thro' Christ, and perfectly  
 agreeable to the dignity of the christian  
 character. We shall be happy in ourselves,  
 and daily experience that peace of God,  
 which passeth all understanding; a peace,  
 which this vain world, can neither give, nor  
 take away. And when the various trials  
 and troubles of this transitory state are over,  
 we shall be brought, by the great Captain of  
 our salvation, to the haven, where we would  
 be: He will support us in our last conflict  
 with death, the awful king of terrors: Sin,  
 which is the sting of death, our Redeemer  
 has taken away, by his cross and passion;  
 and therefore, being one with him, we may  
 justly cry out in the triumphant language of  
 the apostle, "O death, where is thy sting?  
 "O grave, where is thy victory? The sting  
 "of death is sin; and the strength of sin is  
 "the law. But thanks be to God who giv-  
 "eth



"eth us the victory, thro' our Lord Jesus  
 "Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren,  
 "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abound-  
 "ing in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as  
 "ye know that your labour is not in vain  
 "in the Lord." In vain did I say? God  
 forbid! The Lord Jesus Christ will surely  
 guide us with his counsel here, and here-  
 after receive us into glory. And when these  
 our earthly tabernacles are dissolved, we  
 shall most assuredly have (thro' the redemp-  
 tion which is in Christ) a building of God,  
 an house not made with hands, eternal in  
 the heavens.

*Now to God the Father; God the  
 Son; and God the Holy Ghost; be ascribed,  
 Ec. Ec. Amen.*

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